

A  
A  
0  
0  
1  
0  
6  
3  
7  
0  
7  
2



UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY

PN  
3375  
C3



7.



YALE STUDIES IN ENGLISH

ALBERT S. COOK, EDITOR

XII

THE SHORT STORY

BY

HENRY SEIDEL CANBY



NEW YORK

HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

1902



YALE STUDIES IN ENGLISH

ALBERT S. COOK, EDITOR

XII

THE SHORT STORY

BY

HENRY SEIDEL CANBY



NEW YORK  
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

1902





PW  
3375  
L3

## PREFATORY NOTE

Several paragraphs in that portion of the following discussion which treats of the relation between the Short Story and the novel, are quoted, with some alteration, from an article in *The Dial* of October 16th, 1901, in which I approached this particular differentiation with a narrower view than the one which I have endeavored to take in this essay. For very helpful suggestions, valuable criticism, and kind encouragement in this attempt to define the Short Story, I wish especially to thank Professor Wilbur L. Cross. I am indebted, also, to Professor Albert S. Cook, Professor Charles S. Baldwin, and to other members of the Yale faculty for enlightening criticism, and to Mr. Chauncey B. Tinker for help in reading proof. I shall be deeply gratified if this investigation contributes in the slightest degree to a clearer conception of a very interesting literary form.



## THE SHORT STORY

In all criticism there may be distinguished a literary algebra which, by the use of a word or a phrase for a development or a tendency, greatly facilitates thinking and writing. 'Sentimentalism,' 'preraphaelite,' 'impressionistic,' are such words, and very useful, although almost defying exact definition. 'Sentimentalism' now stands for a much wider range of ideas than the early eighteenth century would have found in it, and in a like manner the simple term 'short story' seems to have taken to itself a meaning only partially indicated by the adjective 'short.' For the sake of clearness in language, it is essential that the use of this expression as a symbol should first be made clear, and then justified. Such is the purpose of this discussion, and the attempt will demand a clear statement of that which differentiates the Short Story from the novel and the narrative which happens to be short. For this last extensive genus I will henceforth use the word 'tale,' and keep 'Short Story' for a subdivision, perhaps a distinct nineteenth century development, which will show not only that literary individuality which any careful reader must feel, but definable qualities as well.

### I.

Tales, short narratives, usually of one episode, have of course existed since man first felt the need of turning actual or imagined happening into words. Their development from the stories of the Egyptian papyri, or the fables of Pilpai, or whatever beginning you are pleased to take, has been that of narrative in general, and in each literary period before the nineteenth century

## The Short Story

the short story differs from the long principally in the matter of length, although a didactic purpose, which will be found much more frequently in the briefer variety, may cause some divergence in the selection and use of incident. But, as a rule, one takes an episode, the other ten, or condensation makes the difference.

It is possible to select among the famous tales of past times a few which will be typical. The 'Cupid and Psyche' of *The Golden Ass* of Apuleius, is perhaps the best example of the classic, and 'Ruth' of the Biblical. For one type of the mediaeval 'The Patient Griselda' of the Decameron, and for another *Amis and Amile* will be representative; and, of a very different nature, that tale of the courtesan, and the hypocritical scholar and the spendthrift, her prey, in Green's *A Groat's Worth of Wit for a Million of Repentance*, of the late sixteenth century, will stand for that period. Do these differ in *genus* from longer stories of their times, from *Daphnis and Chloe*, from *Reynard the Fox*, from the prose romances of chivalry, from Nash's *Jack Wilton*? Scarcely, for they are all simple narrative, designed first of all to tell a story. In one case the plot is slighter, or perhaps there is but one main episode, or there is condensation, and, seemingly, no other important distinction.

And this is illustrated by the story of Ruth, one of the best-told and most beautiful stories in literature. Naomi, with her daughter, returns out of the country of Moab into Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest. Ruth gleanes in the fields of Boaz, her kinsman, and gains his love. He marries her, and so ends the story. This is simple narrative, which, aping history, purports to select from the events which are supposed to have happened all those necessary to give a true account of the episode. In spite of the perfect unity of the story, this method might readily be continued, in such a way that our tale, without change, should become the

## The Short Story

first chapter in a longer narrative, which, supposing for an instant that the contemporary novel were in question, would take a different and a wider view, and illustrate very probably the evil results of such a hasty marriage.

The plot of 'Cupid and Psyche' is more extensive than that of 'Ruth,' and covers a greater period of time, but it, too, is a simple product of selection on the author's part from a certain amount of imagined incident. If he had cut out less, or added more episodes, the story would have been a long one; thus the actual tale is merely a condensation of a hypothetical narrative of greater length. Successful condensation, to be sure, requires an art of its own, a very nice choice of incident and a very efficient setting forth of character, but this is scarcely enough to supply a dividing line between the long story and the short tale.

Nor is it possible to foist a definition upon the intrigue stories, the *novelle* and the *fabliaux* of the Middle Ages, and say when they differ from an incident, let us say, in a picaresque novel. In 'The Patient Griselda' of Boccaccio the treatment is not altogether natural; character, atmosphere, and verisimilitude are sacrificed to the action, and even the conception of a long-suffering woman serves principally to make the plot go. The friendship of Anis and Amile is a like impelling force, and there are dozens of stories in the *Decameron* and the *Gesta Romanorum* and like collections which are skeletons merely. But pad out with details, construct an extension at either end, and you have a novel of the Smollett type without change of form. Select certain 'dovetailable' stories from the *Decameron*, clip off the first and last paragraphs, normalize the principal characters, and you can obtain a structure with a notable resemblance to certain portions of *Gil Blas*, or *Humphry Clinker*, minus the general reflections. The tale in a *Groat's Worth of Wit*, thus treated, could easily be smuggled into *Jack Wilton*.

## The Short Story

What has been said of 'Ruth' will apply to the eighteenth century tale, although the short narratives which are to be found scattered through the pages of the *Spectator*, the *Guardian*, and other periodical publications of the age, may be noted as partial exceptions. These stories, as Mr. Walter Morris Hart points out in his *Hazethorne and the Short Story*, are a development of the periodical essay. They are intended to illustrate concretely what the essay might fail to explain as well by general exposition. Upon this assumption he proceeds to derive the Short Story from the periodical essay, and with his conclusion I shall have to do later. But the point to be emphasized here is that while these stories are intended to make an explanation more telling, and therefore have a purpose beyond that of simple narrative, they may be detached from their context, and this purpose excluded. They become then simple tales, although the selection of incident will here lead toward the exposition of the point to be made, just as in the intrigue stories it favors the development of the plot. So with Christ's parables, or the moralized beast-tales, and with all fables which, throughout the ages, have been told with a more or less didactic purpose. These eighteenth century stories are all more or less of the same type, but they constitute no new development in literature. To select a few at random, the 'Letter from Octavia Complaining of the Ingratitude of Her Husband,' which is No. 322 of the *Spectator*, is a good example, whose text is the inadvisability of marrying a man above you, as that of the 'Letter from Sir John Envil, married to a Woman of Quality,' No. 299 in the same periodical, is the inconvenience of marrying a woman of greater rank than yourself. Both of these, apart from their explanatory introduction, are simple tales requiring no moral reflection, just as 'Ruth' does not require that one should say, at the end, 'this shows that one should be humble in mind.' These tales

## The Short Story

always tend to run beyond that which is necessary for the argument. 'The Story of Theodosius and Constantine,' No. 164 of the *Spectator*, is such a narrative, and Dr. Langhorne expanded this into a collection of letters filling two volumes. Indeed, these tales may be easily fitted into, or abstracted from, the longer stories of the time. You cannot precisely cut up the *Vicar of Wakefield* into a certain number of *Spectator* stories, because the *Vicar* is a novel, and there are certain differences in structure and treatment, but it is possible to extract a number of tales therefrom, leaving a residue of piecing and filling. One such tale would be the trip to the fair, in which Moses bought a gross of green spectacles; another the intrigue between Olivia and Mr. Thornhill; the story of George Primrose's travels would be still another; and, by selection and condensation, enough narratives to furbish out many *Spectators* could easily be provided, while the moral reflections to precede them might be found in the same text. Generally speaking, then, there would seem to be no generic distinction in narrative before the nineteenth century other than narrative short and long, tales of many episodes and tales of one, with a partial exception for fables and such didactic tales, and with this qualification, that in the best of the shorter variety there is usually a certain husbandry of words and choice of incident which indicates a consciousness of the necessity of doing a great deal in a little space. It is partly this realization, with a conception of the power of brevity, that has led to the mechanical development of the Short Story.

If what has been said so far be taken to indicate that the ancient family of tales possesses no fundamental distinction except length, and sometimes a certain point of view, to set apart its members from narrative in general, then, in order to discover any originality in the Short Story, it is necessary to find a real difference between 'Ruth,' a 'Roger de Coverley' paper, or

## The Short Story

'Isabella and the Pot of Basil,' and 'A Lodging for the Night,' 'The Ship that Found Herself,' or 'The Real Thing.' The difference is easily *felt* by the reader, but the question remains, is it merely mechanical and due to a more dramatic structure, or is it of deeper origin?

In the early part of this century, Irving began the publication of short tales possessing greater merit than any hitherto produced here. These stories were modeled, presumably, upon some of the *Spectator* papers, and resemble them in form. They are tales still, in that their purpose is simple narrative, but in careful workmanship and conscious art they more closely approximate to the modern Short Story form. Irving's attitude toward the children of his fancy could not have been far different from that of Boccaccio or Chaucer. He says, in his introduction to the *Tales of a Traveler*: 'For my part, I consider a story merely as a frame upon which to stretch my materials. It is the play of thought, and sentiment, and language; the weaving in of characters, lightly, yet expressively delineated; the familiar and faithful exhibition of scenes in common life; and the half-concealed vein of humor that is often playing through the whole—these are among what I aim at, and upon which I felicitate myself in proportion as I think I succeed.'

Let us take a story, 'The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,' which is an excellent result of such a process, and compare it with Hawthorne's 'The White Old Maid,' a Short Story in which the element I wish to bring forward is slightly exaggerated, and therefore well-fitted to our purpose. 'The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,' like 'Ruth,' is a story of a simple episode, although, in the complicated plot, the emphasis placed upon the denouement, and the vivid description, it betrays much more conscious art. But what is the impression of the reader? It can scarcely be called an impression, although there



## *The Short Story*

will be distinct pictures arising from the vividness of the narrative; it will rather be a memory of a series of events, and to produce such a record is the aim of simple narrative. What machinery there is in the story consists mainly of devices to emphasize certain portions, to create an atmosphere, and to catch and hold the interest in the characters. Contrast now with this 'The White Old Maid.' Very briefly, the plot is as follows: Two young women sit in a mysterious room beside the dead body of a youth they have both loved. There has been mysterious wrong done to him, now dead, and the guilty one—the dark girl by his bedside—is to do penance through suffering in the world before she may come back to that room to be forgiven. Years pass, the ancient house without inhabitant falls into gloomy disrepair; in the town a mysterious woman, robed in white, follows for a generation each funeral. One day she appears without her accustomed cause, knocks on the ancient doorway of the deserted house, and, to the confounding of the townsfolk, is admitted. A coach rolls up the street, upon its panels emblazoned the arms of a family whose last representative has just died abroad. An old woman descends, and also enters the mysterious house. After a while there is a shriek heard from within, and when the aged minister, with one of the townspeople bolder than the rest, has made his way in, and up to the strange chamber, there is the White Old Maid just at the point of death, and they are too late to learn her secret.

This, too, is a story, in the sense that something happens; and yet the real story, by which I mean the narrative which would logically connect and develop these events, is just hinted at, and is not very important. It is subordinated, indeed, to a new aim. 'The White Old Maid' is narrative for a purpose, and this purpose is to suggest an impression, and to leave us with a vivid sensation rather than a number of remembered facts. In

## The Short Story

short, it is contrived, not to leave a record of such and such an old woman who did this or that, but rather to stamp upon our minds the impression of a mystery-haunted house, mysterious figures entering, strange words, and a terrible sorrow behind all. Toward such a result the structure of the plot, every bit of description, every carefully chosen word, directly tends. There is no rambling, leisurely narrative like that of 'Sleepy Hollow,' nor digressions, nor a natural sequence of events such as might be expected in real life. The spell of the end is over every word and every choice of incident. It is this, which, for want of a less abused word, may be called impressionism, that is characteristic to some extent of all typical Short Stories, and serves as the most fundamental distinction between them and the earlier tales.

Before going further, it is well to try to answer the question of source which naturally arises here, and, without dipping far into a historical inquiry, it is possible to hazard a hypothesis. It is evident that following the line of influence of the *Spectator* papers through Irving we discover and can account for a well modeled, carefully written, thoroughly artistic tale. This would and does account for much in the form of Hawthorne's stories. It is as easy to turn to the romantic school of Germany for the new elements which are to be discerned in this story of 'The White Old Maid,' and in much more of his work. In the mystical, rhapsodical writings of that school we cannot fail to be impressed by much that is characteristic of Hawthorne, and of Poe as well. Tieck is more like Hawthorne than is any American writer; Hoffmann's characters, particularly in 'Master Martin,' powerfully suggest the half real, symbolistic figures of Hawthorne's creation. In the introduction to *Serapionsbrüder*, Hoffmann formulates a method which was often Hawthorne's, and is certainly that of many impressionistic, modern short

## The Short Story

stories. 'At least,' he says, 'let each one of us (the Brethren who are to tell the tales) strive earnestly and truly to grasp the image that has arisen in his mind in all its features, its colors, its lights and its shades, and then, when he feels himself really enkindled by them, let him proceed to embody them in an external description.'

Then the resemblance of 'Feathertop' to the 'Vogelscheuche' of Tieck has been often pointed out, and many another resemblance. But none of this proves the direct debt of the Short Story to the Germans. Hawthorne learned to read German, with difficulty, in 1843—that is, after much of his best work had been published. There were translations of a few of Tieck's tales, to be sure, by 1825, but the best were not chosen, and it is not to be assumed that Hawthorne ever saw them. As for 'Vogelscheuche,' it was published in 1835, but in the *Berliner Novellenkranz*, an 'annual,' and Hawthorne could not possibly have read it until after its inclusion in the *Novellensammlung* in 1842. But the suggestion for the story is included among the many in the *American Note-Books*, and dated 1840. Schönbach, whose critical knowledge of the Germans and the American gives him an authoritative word, sums the matter up very definitely. 'Aber, wie Poe glaubte,' he says, 'und seither mit ausdauer nachgeschrieben wird, dass Tieck Hawthorne's muster gewesen und von ihm nachgebildet worden sei, das ist mir schon aus diesem inneren grunde höchst unwahrscheinlich.' This from his 'Beiträge zur Charakteristik Nathaniel Hawthorne's' in *Englische Studien*, in which he reasons the matter from internal as well as external evidence.

To trace an influence is always difficult, and here the result seems particularly doubtful. The Germans of the Romantic School felt much as Hawthorne, and wrote somewhat like him, or he like them; that is about as far

## The Short Story

as it is safe to go. The truth of the matter seems to be that this indefinable and indefinite element of romanticism seems to have been in the air of this period, in Germany, in England, and in America, and Hawthorne perhaps derived his mysticism, his fondness for the unreal, his susceptibility to impressions, much as Wordsworth did his. In fact, in many of Wordsworth's poems impressionistic motives analogous to those which can be traced in most Short Stories are at the root of the writing. 'The Yew Trees,' 'I wandered lonely as a cloud,' perhaps 'To a Highland Girl,' and many another, show such an origin; and Keats and other poets of the period will immediately suggest themselves as companions, and to be classed with Wordsworth in this respect. Think for an instant of the cause and effect of the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn.' This phase of romanticism was in the air, then, and Hawthorne may have absorbed some of it with the Spenser, common food of all romanticists, which he read in his youth. No doubt, too, there was some leaking of German influence to help the matter on.

But the attempt to create an impression through narrative was not thoroughly successful in Germany. The tales of Tieck, and particularly of Hoffmann, are too often formless, rambling, without unity. They arise often enough from impressions, and are intended to convey them. Indeed, in the case of Hoffmann, we have sometimes the history of the actual impression to compare with the story which resulted. But these stories are not good Short Stories, because they do not confine themselves to one unified purpose; they have many of them a motive akin to that of 'The White Old Maid,' but they lack the architectonics necessary to convey it. The best stories of these authors will be found thus deficient—such tales as those in the *Serapionsbrüder*, Tieck's 'The Goblet' or 'The Fair Haired Eckhard.' Fouqué's *Undine* is structurally better designed to gain the end of an impression, but this is a compara-

## *The Short Story*

tively long story, and the impression the very broad one of the mystery of nature.

But Hawthorne, saturated with the same spirit, susceptible as they to the impressions which nature, character, strange incongruities, horrible fancies, made upon his imagination, had at his command the well-ordered instrument which Irving and his literary forefathers had been polishing for their needs; and the use he made of it is largely responsible for the Short Story.

This theory has very little to do with the history of impressionism, and does not assert that Hawthorne was among the first of the impressionists, nor, indeed, that a Short Story writer is a so-called impressionist at all, since that word seems to possess a dangerous variety of meanings. But Hawthorne's story, it seems, is intended to suggest a picture to the mind of the reader, or produce an impression upon it, which will resemble that vivid one which either actually or in imagination the writer received when the combination of the mysterious figure and the strange old house, full of gloomy suggestions, left its record upon his mind. Indeed to convey this seems to be the main purpose of his writing, and, throughout, the story is constructed to convey such an effect. Poe had such an attempt in mind in his work; he expresses it in his criticism of the New Englander's stories: 'If his very initial sentence tend not to the outbringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step.' This 'preconceived effect' may be regarded as the impression which the author wishes to convey.

So the nucleus of 'The Luck of Roaring Camp' may have been the glimpse of a lank, rough figure, with a tiny baby in its arms, and, in spite of the excellent plot, a feeling akin to the pleasurable emotion which would follow upon such a scene in real life remains longest with the reader. According to this theory the process, if one should attempt to write a Short Story, might be something like this: I leave my room and meet a

## The Short Story

drunken beggar reeling from the gutter. As I turn to avoid him, he pulls himself together and quotes huskily a dozen lines of Virgil with a bow and a flourish, and stumbles off into the darkness. I make him into a story, and, be the plot what it may, the effect upon the reader that I shall strive for will be a vivid impression of incongruity, not far different from that which I felt when the drunkard turned scholar and relapsed. Not all short stories can be analyzed back to their basic element as easily as this one may be built up, but with many the process is easy and obvious. Nearly every *conte* of Maupassant is a perfect example; his titles 'Fear,' 'Happiness,' 'The Coward,' would lead you to suspect as much. In the *motifs* and suggestions for stories, some utilized later, some not, which may be found in quantity scattered through Hawthorne's *American Note-Books*, there is often enough such an impression noted at the moment of its inception. Here, in the *American Note-Books*, II. 176, is 'The print in blood of a naked foot to be traced through the streets of a town,' which seems to inspire 'Dr. Grimshaw's Secret,' and again, N.B. I. 13, 'In an old house a mysterious knocking might be heard on the wall, where had formerly been a doorway now bricked up,' which is applied in 'Peter Goldthwaite's Treasure;' also, 'A stranger, dying, is buried; and after many years two strangers come in search of his grave and open it.' But Hawthorne inclined more often to moral, philosophical reflections for his beginnings, such as, 'To make one's own reflection in a mirror the subject of a story,' afterwards used in 'Monsieur de Miroir;' and then his stories become symbolistic tales, or didactic narratives, not partaking of the best qualities of the Short Story. The best of such tales, and yet not to be ranked as a typical Short Story, is 'The Great Stone Face.'

Kipling has written many stories motivated by impressions, such as 'The Ship that Found Herself,' and 'The

## The Short Story

Mark of the Beast,' to take two very different stories. Indeed, nearly every collection of short stories may be drawn upon for examples. In Henry James' story, 'Flickerbridge,' which appeared in *Scribner's* for February, 1902, the action of the story can only be explained by the deep impression which the quaint, delightful lady of Flickerbridge makes upon the hero, which impression it is the intent of the author to convey to the reader; and so with many another.

But the commonest variety is not so simple. Stevenson's 'A Lodging for the Night,' Kipling's 'On the City Wall,' Bret Harte's 'The Outcasts of Poker Flat,' Maurice Hewlett's 'Madonna of the Peach Tree,' and perhaps a majority of the magazine stories of the day, preserve the old desire to tell a story well as an equal or the dominant motive, only modified by the attempt to convey that impression which was probably at the foundation of the narrative. I venture to say that an imagined contrast between the proud, God-honoring, simple-minded *seigneur*, and the poor devil of a Villon, clever and rascally, was the starting point for 'A Lodging for the Night;' and perhaps a sight or a thought of such a group as that about the fire in 'The Outcasts,' the pure and the stained, the reprobate and the innocent, all under the spell of a common peril, was the germ of that great story. But in each case the plot is highly developed, and by no means entirely aims at these single effects, although in each case they are probably sought as the sum of the story.

This subdivision will naturally suggest what is known as the 'character sketch,' a form of the Short Story in which again there is another element besides that of pure impressionism. Take, for instance, Verga's 'Jeli the Shepherd,' a story of a simple herd-boy of good instincts, fostered by close association with nature, a love like hero-worship, and a mind slow to admit new ideas. The story tells how he loves and marries Mara;

## The Short Story

and when the knowledge comes to him that she is false, he merely works on stupidly until one day the realization comes, he sees her with her lover, and a man's throat is cut. This story is psychological, it deals with character exposition, but it approaches it through an impression; the attempt is first of all to make the reader feel this simple herd-boy's mental make-up and personality, and then, by added incident, fact, and explanation, appeal to the reason, that the impression may be explained. Many of Miss Wilkins' New England stories are similarly constructed. Worn old women, pale girls with colorless ideals—Maupassant would be content with making us feel such types—and often, as in 'Arethusa' and most of her 'Understudies,' Miss Wilkins goes no further, for 'Arethusa' seems to be the working out of that feeling which one gets from a chance sight of a shy girl with the wild instincts of maidenhood in her eyes, and another, 'The Monkey,' the memory of a home-sick monkey reaching his little arms restlessly through the bars of his cage. But the commoner type of character Short Story deals with an impression reinforced by psychological work, or motive-seeking, or thought-exposition, designed to appeal to the reason of the reader, to confirm and make more complete, more reasonable, the impression he has received from the story. Björnson, Miss Jewett, Henry James, Turgenieff—there are dozens who have written such stories.

Mr. Hart, in the article which I have already mentioned, feels evidently that a purpose ulterior to that of mere narrative is the characteristic quality of a Short Story, but he takes this purpose to be explanatory, and a proof, that an essay is in the family tree, say of the *Plain Tales from the Hills*. The transition from the tales with a purpose of the *Spectator*, which Irving imitated and Hawthorne studied, to the 'impression' story of the latter author, is not difficult, but the step is a long one, and originality can scarcely be denied to the latter form.



## The Short Story

What appeal the *Spectator* tale makes, beyond that of its narrative, is to the intellect solely, while the first aim of the later stories of which I have been speaking is to make the reader feel that with which the writer was impressed. This point may be illustrated by a comparison of *Spectator* paper No. 299, 'Letter from Sir John Envil, married to a Woman of Quality,' with Miss Jewett's story, 'David Berry.' The first deals with 'those calamities and misfortunes which a weak man suffers from wrong measures and ill-concerted schemes of life,' that is, the danger arising from marrying a wife above his rank; the second with the downfall of a virtuous old shoemaker, brought about indirectly by his ambitious dame. I have quoted a line or so from the introduction in the *Spectator* paper, and it is evident that this story began with an abstraction, a theory, which is dressed in narrative to enforce the point. But it is just as clear that 'David Berry' is first of all an idea, memory, or impression of this kindly old fellow, simple and honest and over-generous, and that the moral side, the lesson that one may learn, is merely the almost inevitable result which follows the working out of a character which would make such an impression upon us. One story works from the abstract forward, the other from the concrete backward. And thus the line of development of the Short Story from the essay source, while in part traceable, is sufficiently tenuous.

Although this impressionism, used strictly as defined, when combined with the other elements of a Short Story, seems to make for a new literary form, there is nevertheless much earlier writing with impressionistic tendencies. Sterne is full of it and the *Sentimental Journey* has a kind of impressionism as its most serious purpose. But the *Sentimental Journey* lacks all the other qualifications of a Short Story. It rambles; it has no particular unity; it observes none of the rigid requirements which confine a Short Story to one inci-

## The Short Story

dent, one main impression, and a unified, climactic development. It would be possible to select an episode such as that with the glove-merchant's wife, or the *fille de chambre*, which would have a considerable unity, but the impressions he chronicles here are slight ones, so slight that a graceful style, wit, and chance hits can convey them, and the narrative amounts to nothing, or is there for its own sake. Many poets, too, have been praised for, or accused of, impressionism, but, except in regard to sources, this is outside the inquiry, since it is with the Short Story as with the novel, its elements are to be found elsewhere, but it is their combination, and their development when so combined, which results in a form distinct from its antecedents.

The particular terseness, vividness attained by choice of words, swift description, and speedy action characteristic of this modern story, are all naturally employed in the attempt to convey with sufficient force the impression which the author has received. In the simple narrative of the early tales these devices are utilized to some extent. But it is this new, or newly matured, purpose, which has brought to nicety that which may be called the machinery of the Short Story. To tell a tale well requires careful arrangement of events, a careful proportioning, careful adjustment of description and of narration, of character and action. But, by means of this well told tale, to make a vivid impression of a mood, a character, an incongruity, a pathetic situation, or a strange companionship, as in the 'Brushwood Boy,' a still more careful art is necessary. Every word must count, and, for the sake of definite outline, everything not essential must be rigorously excluded. The result is a concise, narrative picture of something striking in events or in character, or in the union of the two.

Suppose this process be applied to a tale which is to be told for the story simply, notably a tale with a reversal. Should this story be written with the terse-

## The Short Story

ness, the vivid action, the condensed description, the absolute unity and totality of the Short Story form, the result will be a vivid impression of the plot, and particularly of the reversal, but not an impression in precisely the sense which I have used before. Many modern stories may be included here, of which the ubiquitous detective story, best exemplified perhaps in Poe's 'The Purloined Letter,' is the most familiar. For the tales with a reversal, a surprise at the end, we must look to work of a lighter mood. Some of H. C. Bunner's *Short Sixes*, such a tale as Aldrich's 'Margery Daw,' and many familiar narratives, will be remembered and so classified. It is very difficult to find good Short Stories now in which some trace of the impressionistic element cannot be discovered, but those belonging to the class of 'The Purloined Letter' or 'Margery Daw' may be said to be tales, in the sense defined, built along the lines developed for the Short Story; and this highly perfected, very dramatic structure is largely a result of the attempt to convey an impression by narrative.

## II.

Although this hypothesis of impressionism may give us ground for believing that the Short Story contains elements which set it apart from the tale, even when its purpose is not mainly suggestive, yet it is not a sufficient answer to the interesting question of the relation of the Short Story to the novel. For it is obvious that this particular kind of suggestive purpose may figure largely in a novel, even when it is not classed among those commonly called impressionistic. It is possible to take, say the river episode in 'The Ordeal of Richard Feverel,' where, as you remember, Richard Feverel, under romantic circumstances, saves his future betrothed from a ducking, and to say that Meredith wishes to convey to the

## The Short Story

reader a vivid impression of the conjunction of the fresh girl and the moody boy, whose spirit is tinder to her spark. If this is impressionistic, and there is no other distinction, then a Short Story may be merely an episode abstracted from a hypothetical novel; which is not the conclusion I intend to reach.

It has been said that unity of impression is the distinguishing point, and this, in a sense, is true, but as a definition it seems to lack precision. Poe used this phrase in argument, and thought mainly of the time-element. A tale could be read at a sitting; a novel must be read in gulps, as it were, of a handful of chapters each, and the impression which the unity of the tale should convey naturally suffers. But the phrase seems to be used now with reference to the effect of the design of the narrative upon the reader, whether read in one sitting or a dozen. A single, vivid impression is to be the result of the Short Story, while many diverse yet harmonious impressions are to follow upon the reading of a novel. Yet surely many novels, such as George Eliot's *Romola* or Meredith's *The Egoist*, leave a unified impression not entirely differing from that of the definition above. In the first, the degeneration of Tito Melema is not only the central thread, but the digest of the whole story; as in the other book is the egoism of Willoughby. Neither this quality, nor the unity gained by condensation, is a sufficient justification for the separate classification of the Short Story and the novel.

There is another way of getting at this matter. The great difference between a poem, a historical essay, and a novel upon the same subject, lies in the point of view. The poem works through imagination and suggestion. The history deals with the facts that the poem almost neglects, and has to do with selection among these facts. The novel, supposing it to be historical, uses first the methods of the history, leavens the result with fancy, sets it forth suggestively, and, keeping in view the end

## The Short Story

of art instead of the necessity for truth, produces still other results. Compare, for instance, Carlyle's life of Cromwell, Milton's sonnet on Cromwell, and Scott's novel based upon the life of the same hero. It is such a distinction in the point of view which differentiates a novel from a Short Story.

From the eighteenth century downward to near the present time, the great novelists have tried, from their little Olympus, to get the all-embracing view, to record the good and the bad, the thought and the action, the youthful deed and the aged penalty. Either by details, or, when that was not practicable, by suggestion, their transcription of life has been as full as they could make it. Their art is always to imitate the breadth and the fullness of living. At one extreme of this imitation is realism, and there the picture is somewhat photographic; at the other extreme is romance, where the reader's imagination is tickled into supplying much not plainly told by the author. In either case, the life depicted in the books, like the life in the world, has many facets, and, even though the multiplicity of actual experience may not be present, the suggestion of it, if the book is good, will not be lacking. Thus this novel is natural, in so far as any artistic transfer of the real world into the world of imagination can be natural.

But here we must make a further qualification and separation. All modern novels do not attempt to convey the suggestion of the whole of life, facet and facet, even though, to a greater extent than the Short Story, they ape the multiplicity of actual experience. What of the so-called impressionistic school of which, in English at least, Henry James is the head? If you examine his *Washington Square*, you will find it to be a love story of some length and of actual manners, a novel, indeed, according to definition, and yet every incident, every detail, every bit of description is focused upon the relation between the dull and faithful Catherine and

## The Short Story

her lover, the brilliant but unsteady Maurice Townsend. The story covers the life of the girl to middle age, yet there is only one point of view, and, at the end, one impression. But this impression is not the result of the fusion of numerous observations, each drawn, as in real life, from some attitude, action, or remark upon character. This is the method of *Romola* and of *The Egoist*, but in *Washington Square* it is attained by the presentation of certain incidents selected from the girl's life-story. To use a geological figure, Henry James follows a single vein throughout its course by means of an occasional outcrop. Among foreigners, Turgenieff has done notable work, which must be regarded from this view-point. His *Mumu* is the story of the brute love of a gigantic serf Garassim for first a woman, and then a dog. The interest of the story centres entirely in this love and the character of which it is a result. *The Diary of a Superfluous Man* wonderfully presents a weak-willed, conceited lover, doing no work in the world and aware of it, but hungering for the tribute of praise and affection which only one worth it can gain. This is a life-story from birth to death, but this unfortunate's character, or lack of it, can be thoroughly illustrated in the course of his short love affair, and consequently the incidents selected are nearly all from that event itself, or preparatory to it, or in summary of what it has shown. Select certain passages regarding Levin from *Anna Karénina*, and you could construct a companion piece. These 'impressionistic novels' and their class, to some extent an intermediate form between the novel of the *Vanity Fair* type and the Short Story, may perhaps be looked upon as expanded Short Stories, and belonging to their *genus*. Without the concentration of that instrument and the resulting vividness, they are told with a like view, and a like selection of those facts which are at the base of all narration.

## The Short Story

But in the novel which attempts to give a natural picture of the various sides of life there is a point of view which differs from that of the Short Story. If the name had not already been appropriated, I should like to say the *historical novel*, because in this respect it follows the methods of history. The 'ubiquitous novel' it has been called, I believe, and this expresses the distinction which results in another structure and another treatment from that of the Short Story.

The primal difference lies in the way the authors view their crude materials, which is to say the life about them. While the novel writer, even one of the impressionistic type, aims at an eminently natural method of transcription, the author of the Short Story adopts a very artificial one. His endeavor is to give a striking narrative picture of one phase of the situation or the character, as the case may be. His aim is toward a strip lengthwise, disregarding much that a cross-section might show. He deals with a series of incidents, closely related to one another but not at all to the by-play of life which, in reality, must accompany them. He treats of a mood always existing, but in the story supremely indicated; perhaps of an adventure or a catastrophe, which differs from the *dénouement* of a novel in that the interest is concentrated: the cause is in the hero's character, ready-made for the occasion; the results are in the circumstances of the tale. If all narration amounts, as critics say, merely to a simplification of experience, imaginative or real, then a Short Story is simplification to the highest degree. We are selecting far more than in a novel, and this because we are looking only for the chain of related incidents that go to make up one event. We are picking out the steps that make the tragedy, as in Maupassant's famous tale 'La Parure,' or in Bret Harte's 'The Outcasts of Poker Flat'; we are looking only for what bears upon our narrow purpose, that the interest may be concentrated, and the con-

## The Short Story

ception vivified, beyond the power of a novel. The process is very artificial, but very powerful; it is like turning a telescope upon one nebula in the heavens. Thus it is the standpoint of the author that makes the distinction between a short novel, always excepting the impressionistic variety, and a long Short Story. In the one the writer digests life-histories, or portions of them; in the other he looks only for the episode, which, like the bubble on the stream, is part of, and yet distinguished from, the main current. Recognizing the futility in certain cases, and the needlessness in others, of expressing the whole truth, he succeeds much better with the half. He foregoes completeness and gains in force, and this by a change in the standpoint from which he views his world of fact and fancy.

Evidence that the Short Story and the novel are not products of the same artistic process has been sought in the frequent inability of writers of good Short Stories to construct equally good novels, and if this argument is not pushed too far it is a good one. Hawthorne, perhaps, certainly Maupassant and Kipling, men who made their literary reputation by their Short Stories, found, and in the case of Kipling and his *Kim*, still find, difficulty with the longer form of the story. Björnson had trouble in handling his novels, *Flags are Flying in Town and Harbor*, and *In God's Way*, and much more testimony of the same character may be gathered. But there is much to be said against an absolute statement, for Tolstoi, Dickens, and many other great novelists have succeeded with the Short Story, and the excellence of Stevenson's unfinished *Weir of Hermiston* is evident even in the fragment which he gave us. It is safe to say no more than that the writer of Short Stories finds it generally difficult, and sometimes impossible, to enlarge his conceptions and broaden and lengthen his action to the scope which the novel demands, with this statement in reverse equally true for the novelists. But



## *The Short Story*

this is just what might be expected if, as I have endeavored to show, it is true that the difference between the modes lies in the point of view. For if the writer, who aside from his artistic faculty is after all merely a transcriber, gifted with the power of observation and granted the right of selection from what he sees, should look always for the essential facts that make up his single episode and produce his impression, he might see only Short Stories in the life about him, and find it as difficult to adjust his vision to a different perspective as the forester who looks only for single trees, their height and kind, and now would wish, with artist's eye, to comprehend the curves and colors in the wide sweep of the mountain forest.

To sum up briefly what has been said heretofore, it might be asserted that what is loosely called the modern Short Story seems to differ from the old tale by a very scientific adaptation of means to end, which end may be called vividness, and by a structure which, in its nice proportions and potentiality for adequate expression, is a more excellent instrument than anything the old tale can show. Also, and this is true only of a more definite group which could be called the typical Short Story, through the source, which is an impression or impressions, and the purpose, which is to fitly convey these impressions as well as to tell a story. 'Ruth' will do very well as an example of the tale, 'The Purloined Letter' as a tale done into Short Story form, and 'The White Old Maid,' or 'A Lodging for the Night,' or 'Without Benefit of Clergy,' for the typical Short Story. If it is necessary to say what characterizes all of the shorter stories now being written, I should suggest that it is an attempt at greater vividness, and this attempt is made largely through those practices in composition which the endeavor to convey fitly an impression has brought into common use.

In a comparison with the novel, we may take all these

## The Short Story

shorter stories, and say that the difference lies in the point of view—provided that the novel be of that class which aims at a natural transcription of all sides of life, as does *Middlemarch* or *Vanity Fair*. On the other hand, it may be said that the Short Story differs from the 'impressionistic' novel in concentration only. That literary variety strikes deeper, goes further; but the Short Story is intended for surface work; it is formed to catch and record the striking things, and make them more striking. It is a precipitate of the important things from the general solution, and as such has a force distinctively its own and a form as distinctive, which, through the efforts of the great men who have labored with it, has been developed to gain and to exercise its power.

### III.

New developments in literature do not arise nor become popular without reason. There are causes, artistic and otherwise, for the present blossoming of the Short Story, causes which in themselves differ from those which have made the novel flourish. In a time of much writing, tastes are quickly jaded, and the Short Story, because it is terse, striking, highly-colored, and somewhat new, meets with quick applause. Its brevity is of advantage, for many people can be made to swallow good literature in a pill who reject it in larger doses. But the class of readers thus gained accounts less for the literary development of the tale than for the vast number of poor short stories now breeding manifold. Such a *clientèle* can increase the production, and will usually debase the quality, of any form of literary endeavor, as the attitude of the prurient-minded populace of the Restoration increased and debased the output of the contemporary dramatists. Unintelligent appreciation is not likely to be responsible for a high develop-

## The Short Story

ment in art. That there has been an artistic advance, and a great one, in story telling, needs for illustration only a comparison of a Blackwood's tale of the 30's and a Kipling Indian story.

The old desire for something new and more pungent would account for the encouragement which this new development has received. And there is an undoubted need, in a generation whose life is greatly varied by widely-diffused knowledge and extensive intercommunication, for the vivid expression of little things. This would add another impulse. But a literary structure which displays the greatest nicety of form to be found outside the domain of poetry indicates some more æsthetic cause than those so far mentioned. In simple truth, the Short Story has attained a wonderful perfection because wonderful men have worked with and through it. It has just come into its own. In the England of the 30's, publishers would not look upon anything less than a volume in fiction as a serious literary effort—and they preferred three volumes. It was only in the first half of the last century that Irving, Hawthorne, and Poe in America began the cult of the tale. Coppée's search for the inevitable word, and Maupassant's refinement of the *conte*, came later still. The Short Story was adapted to the needs of the time and the tastes of the people. Men of genius found through it a new voice, and the attempt to perfect, to give laws and a form to the instrument, progressed because of the men who tried. In pre-Hawthornian times these authors employed the tale for the by-products of their minds; since then it has served to express some of the great conceptions of their genius. It is this which best accounts for the chastening of its form.

Except in one instance, which is the vivid expression of single incidents or detached movements in life, the Short Story is not to be chosen before the novel; but in its capacity for perfection of structure, for nice dis-

### *The Short Story*

crimination in means, and for a satisfying exposition of the full power of words, it is much superior to the novel, and can rank only below the poem. But the novel and the Short Story are distinct instruments, differently designed, for diverse needs. And with such a point of view it is impossible not to grant to the latter a separate use and classification.

## YALE STUDIES IN ENGLISH

ALBERT S. COOK, EDITOR

- |       |  |        |
|-------|--|--------|
| I.    | The Foreign Sources of Modern English Versification. Charlton M. Lewis, Ph.D.  | \$0.50 |
| II.   | Ælfric: A New Study of his Life and Writings. Caroline Louisa White, Ph.D.   | 1.50   |
| III.  | The Life of St. Cecilia, from MS. Ashmole 43 and MS. Cotton Tiberius E. VII, with Introduction, Variants, and Glossary. Bertha Ellen Lovewell, Ph.D.                   | 1.00   |
| IV.   | Dryden's Dramatic Theory and Practice. Margaret Sherwood, Ph.D.  | .50    |
| V.    | Studies in Jonson's Comedy. Elisabeth Woodbridge, Ph.D.  | .50    |
| VI.   | A Glossary of the West Saxon Gospels, Latin-West Saxon and West Saxon-Latin. Mattie Anstice Harris, Ph.D.  | 1.50   |
| VII.  | Andreas: The Legend of St. Andrew, translated from the Old English, with an Introduction. Robert Kilburn Root  | .50    |
| VIII. | The Classical Mythology of Milton's English Poems. Charles Grosvenor Osgood, Ph.D.   | 1.00   |
| IX.   | A Guide to the Middle English Metrical Romances dealing with English and Germanic Legends, and with the Cycles of Charlemagne and of Arthur. Anna Huft Billings, Ph.D. | 1.50   |
| X.    | The Earliest Lives of Dante, translated from the Italian of Giovanni Boccaccio and Lionardo Bruni Aretino. James Robinson Smith  | .75    |
| XI.   | A Study in Epic Development. Irene T. Myers, Ph.D.   | 1.00   |
| XII.  | The Short Story. Henry Seidel Canby  | .30    |





PA

THE LIBRARY  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
Santa Barbara

THIS BOOK IS DUE ON THE LAST DATE  
STAMPED BELOW.

~~JAN 6 1969~~ H

SEP 3 1985

SEP 7 1985 2

~~JUL 6 '70 629~~

D

~~JAN 11 '71 12~~

J

~~JAN 28 '74 1~~

P

~~JAN 1 31 024~~

P

411  
d

~~JUN 20 '77~~

2

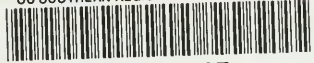
Series 0182





3 1205 00657 2307

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



**AA** 001 063 707 2

